

Trying Out Hugo Bezdek and a "New Idea" in Baseball

BY J. B. SHERIDAN.

WHEN Barney Dreyfus made Hugo Bezdek, a bold Bohemian, manager of the Pittsburgh club a great experiment was made in baseball. For Bezdek never was a professional baseball player, not even an amateur of any great repute.

It was as a football player with the University of Chicago that Bezdek earned fame. He had been a tenth rate professional boxer and he had played some college and amateur baseball; he had taught football and baseball at the universities of Arkansas and Oregon and acted as a scout for the Pittsburgh club. The spheres of his activities kept him from seeing many major league ball games. He has given baseball not even the study of the fervid fan.

So the coming of Bezdek into baseball means a trial of the New Idea, the application of the theory of the superman, that a man who can do one thing well can do all things well. This is primarily a Germanic theory, at least it has been very highly developed in Germany as a state philosophy. It has had some individualistic followers in the United States. Most successful Americans have believed that a successful man can do anything successfully. Their idea is not entirely absurd. A successful salesman can sell all sorts of goods and a successful financier can manage all sorts of financial institutions.

A Manager of Men.

Bezdek is noted as a manager of men, a driver, a coxer, a persuader, a human dynamo. He knows little about major league baseball and admits it. But he understands the fundamental principles of organization of athletic teams and of the game which he is hired to play. So, say the supporters of the Superman idea, Bezdek will be a success as a baseball manager.

The old-line baseball men scout the idea. Old-time men always scout the idea. Old-time baseball men scouted the idea introduced in baseball by Branch Rickey. Rickey's ideas prevailed. Rickey, to be sure, was a thoroughly schooled baseball man, a minor and major league player, a college man, a lawyer. Bezdek is a college man, a chemist, a doctor of medicine, a boxer, a wrestler, a strong man, everything but a baseball player.

The experiment that is being tried at Pittsburgh is this: Is an educated man who has attained some reputation as a handler of men more likely to score success in baseball, a game of which he has only a superficial knowledge, than the old-line baseball player who is not particularly well educated and who knows little of anything but baseball?

Control of the Temper.

Let it be understood that some of the reputed smartest baseball men that have ever played the game have been flat failures as managers, because of defects of nature and temperament. Some of the smart pitchers could turn out good pitchers, but failed to develop other players in other positions. One extraordinary keen pitcher has been a manager for fifteen years. He has always developed good pitchers, but he has never been able to judge or develop batters, infielders, outfielders or catchers.

Two great all-around ballplayers, men who made great successes as pitchers, catchers, infielders, outfielders, hitters and base runners, who were known as ballplayers of brilliant thinking capacity, failed as managers because they could not control their tempers when their players made mistakes.

The brilliant players could not understand why every man could not think or instinctively act as fast and as properly as they could. They would lose patience with stupidity and "bawl out" stupid players. This antagonized the players and demoralized the team.

As a sheer matter of fact, brilliant ballplayers, brilliant instinctive actors, as well as brilliant manual performers, have rarely made great managers. Comiskey, Moran, Mack—all great managers—were mediocre players. Indeed, McGraw is the only brilliant player who made a brilliant manager. And McGraw's tongue has always been a whiplash on the backs of his men. James J. Callahan and Roger Bresnahan, two of the greatest all-around ballplayers that have ever lived, brilliant instinctive actors, have not proven winning managers. Hal Chase, Jimmie Collins, Hugh Duffy, Hans Wagner and a horde of other stars failed to achieve success as managers.

Now it is to be proven if the man who never has been a professional ballplayer, but who has the breadth of mind a college education is supposed to give, and who has established a name for ability to instruct and organize athletic teams can succeed where the brilliant natural, but uncultivated, player failed.



JIMMY CALLAHAN



HUGO BEZDEK

In other words, in the Bezdek case we are up against the old fetish of "the capable organizer and executive." This interesting man was born in the country near Prague, Bohemia, some thirty-three years ago. His forefathers had been school-teachers, strong men and athletes. Bezdek is a man of great strength. He inherited it from a long line of huge and powerful forebears.

The family emigrated to America when Hugo Bezdek was 6 years old. Young Bezdek took to the sports of American boys and grew great, mostly laterally, as he grew older. He could do a man's work in the hay field or at the forge when he was 14 years old. He loved to box, wrestle and play football. He could play baseball, too, but it was not by any means his favorite game.

Bezdek is an oddity in one regard: Most baseball men are studying professions or taking steps to get out of the game, to be something other than athletes. Bezdek is a chemist, a doctor, a linguist, but he wants to continue in athletics.

"I have been interested in athletics since I came to America," said the new Pirate, "and I am more interested in them now than when I was a boy or a young man. It is in me. I generate a lot of energy from my food and air and I must have physical exercise. I would die if I pursued a sedentary occupation. I dare say it is in self-defense that I stick to athletics and keep away from the chemist's retort and the physician's chair."

Football a Relief.

"Football suited me to a nicety. It gave me room for hard physical work. I was so rough and awkward and strong that most young men and boys did not like to box or wrestle with me. So football, where I could cut loose with all my energy, was a great relief for me. It may seem egotistical to say so, but I do not mean it that way. I was too strong to find all the work I wanted in baseball. I wish I was more delicate in my athletic appetite, that I could get satisfaction out of a game of tennis or a short run or swim. I feel sorry for my huge, ungainly self sometimes. You may say I might try grubbing brush, pulling stumps or obtain employment as a quarry man. I wish my mind would

be quiet and let me do such hard work. Two things keep me from taking to the hard physical labor that I need: One is that my mind is too active, and the other is that, unfortunately, my family and myself have acquired standards of living that cannot be maintained on the wage of the day laborer or the quarry man.

"One man told me not long ago that I should engage with the army to carry a cannon or pull a wagon. I would like to do these things, too, but there, again, is the dependent family. So I do the best I can, make as much money as possible and take as much of the necessary exercise as is possible, too."

The "Git Up and Git."

"I think that athletic sports are essential to the vitality of a nation. You may say that Germany, which has shown marvelous vitality, has never been given to games. That is true. Withal, I think that had the Germans tuned themselves up on athletic games, instead of laboring twelve hours a day or down to dark, they would have put up a much more lively, dashing fight than they have put up. The Germans are enduring and they are strong, but they lack the life, the vivre, the elan, the 'git up and git' of the Americans, Italians, French, English, Austrians, Hungarians and Bohemians. The Germans fight well through organization and sheer strength."

"I do not mean that you can make men strong or a nation great on athletics alone. Hard work gives a power that no athletics can impart. Too much hard work slows men up. Then comes athletics to enliven them, to give them dash, go."

"The athlete will derive fun from fighting, as the English, Canadians and Australians have done, while the German takes no fun from fighting. War with him is an unpleasant duty. To the nations that have practiced athletics war is a lot of a lark, a superlative sport."

"Therefore I set a high value on the use of athletics to a nation. So, when I teach and help to propagate athletics I feel that I am in my small way doing a public good."

"Games tune up the physical man. I have been teaching athletics to farm-boys and young mechanics, strong

men, for ten years. I know how strong and slow they are when they first come to the hand of the athletic director, and I also know how a few weeks of athletic exercises tunes and speeds the men up."

"Hard work for a nation will make it strong but dull and slow. Hard work tempered by athletic exercises, will speed up the people of a nation, enlighten their thought, tune 'em up, put smiles on their faces, unbend their brows—in a word, put real life into them."

"That is why I am devoted to athletics. Had I, a very strong man, been compelled to merely labor like a horse all my life, I have no doubt that I should have been ill-tempered, even ferocious—certainly unpleasant, if not nasty. But play and games have made me joyous and happy and, I trust, not unlikable."

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Well, I believe that too much work and too little play has made the Germans not exactly dull, but slow of mind and body and very serious and oversolemn. This is why I think that the great war weighs heavier on the Germans than on the French, British or Americans, who have had athletic sports to lighten their spirits."

"I have read that the German could not understand how the Australians and Canadians, sport-loving people, had such a good time in battle. 'Why,' said a German to a Canadian, 'you Canadians seem to be fighting for fun and souvenirs.' 'Sure!' cried the Canuck. 'What do you fight for?' 'Why, as a duty,' said the surprised Teuton."

Tuning Up the Temper.

"I hope that I have been able to explain to you how important athletic sports are in tuning up the temper of a people, making men and women and children happy and glad that they are alive."

"This is why I deem athletics so important to a nation. The high-class German philosophers and army men rather despised the British because of their devotion to athletics. Gen. Bernhardi, in his famous 'Germany and the Next War,' advises Germans to avoid athletic sports as liable to detract from their

undivided interests in military affairs. I think that Gen. Bernhardi was wrong. I do not say that passionate practice of athletics will make a nation great in war or in peace. I do hold that if the Germans, tremendously strong men and hard workers, were tuned up and enlivened by the practice of athletics that they would fight better than they have fought and that war would not weigh so heavily on them as it has weighed."

"I am trying hard to make plain my meaning. It is that while hard labor gives greatest strength, athletics give tang, snap, to the physical strength engendered by hard labor."

"Baseball is having a tremendous boom through the interest of the soldiers in the American and other armies take in it. Golf, tennis, other sports are forgotten when the soldiers go into camp. Only baseball is remembered and played."

"The general play of baseball by American and Canadian troops in France will spread the game to the Australians, who have already taken it up at home; to the Belgians, French, British, and even the Germans."

"It was the civil war that spread baseball in the United States. The great war will spread baseball to the ends of the earth. The British troops embrace East Indians, West Indians, Fiji Islanders, Afrikanders, etc. The French have Chinese, Madagascans, Samatrans. So the American game will go to far off places after the great war."

Bezdek does not enjoy talking about himself as most men do. He said that he greatly enjoyed his years of football when he was the great plunging full back of Chicago University.

"Football more than any other sport gave me the freedom of physical action that my body and spirit craved," said the young director of the Pirate club. "I was born strong. That is no credit to me. In fact, I am a little ashamed of such brutal physical power. Some-

times I feel as if I was too much of an animal to be much good to myself or to others. My vitality is, sometimes, terrible to me. I crave action, pulling, mauling, hauling."

"Now, most men do not care for such physical extravagances, and I have had trouble getting action that carried life and spirit and fun with it. I could have acted as mule in a canal boat or heaved rock, but that would satisfy only the physical craving, and not the desire for mental enjoyment."

Must Have Action.

"So I loved the clash of football when I met many men, instead of one. I loved to teach football, too. One gets a lot of action out of that. 'Baseball was pretty good in some ways, but not action enough, even when I caught. Tennis and golf did not appeal to me at all. I am just too strong for those games.'"

Bezdek has made a great record as manager of football teams. He took the lowly Arkansans when they were despised of all football teams in the Southwest and made them the most feared. From Arkansas he went to the University of Oregon and repeated his success there. While at Oregon he ran up against the famous Gilmour Doble, who was coaching Washington, and who had a record of no games lost and but two tied in seven seasons of football. Before Bezdek went to Oregon Washington had beaten the Web-feet right down the line. Bezdek teams held Doble tight, and though Washington had the best material and was coached by a man of vast reputation, Oregon, under Bezdek, acquitted itself so well that the athletic instructor was made football coach at the same salary as he got for being director of athletics. This gave him nine months more to himself. It was during these nine months that he became scout for the Pittsburgh club and so impressed Barney Dreyfus that when Jim Callahan was done Bezdek was offered the position of manager made famous by Fred Clarke, who, in

fourteen years, never finished worse than fourth.

Not a Connie Mack.

Bezdek admits that he is not a Connie Mack as far as baseball is concerned, but says that he likes baseball and is confident that he will make good. His friends say that he has never failed in any of his undertakings. It is true that his undertakings have been in his own line, college football, baseball and track athletics. Bezdek is in another game now, a game in which competition is fierce and where points, position, mean everything. Bezdek is up against the real thing now.

Much depends upon Bezdek's ability to manage men. He evidently is away back in the science of major league baseball.

In such things as substituting batters, even in selecting batters to go against a certain pitcher he knows little. This is natural. He has not been on the major league circuit. He does not know what batters are effective against what pitchers, or vice versa. He does not even know the teams that his pitchers are effective against. Bezdek will need some time to learn these things.

Then, managing from the stand is very different from managing in fact. The real manager makes the first guess. The grand stand manager has a second guess. The real manager creates situations. The grand stand manager merely solves the created situations. The competent major league manager knows the weakness, mental and psychological, of every player in his league. He acquires this knowledge by a process of absorption which covers a period of many years. He began to acquire this knowledge when he was a minor league player, and he has kept on acquiring it for all the years of his baseball life.

"Little Willie—Say, pa, what is an innocent bystander?"
Pa—An innocent bystander, my son is a sort of human target."

The Best Thing About the Nonworrying Habit
Is That No One Is Begging You to Break Yourself
of It